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Help Comes Just in Time for Small Business

Small business owner creates job opportunities for community



Photo: USAID

Yumer Salim's wife, Nefie Yusein, demonstrates how the new equipment can perform sewing tasks more rapidly.

Tucked away on a side street near the central square of Momchilgrad town, the Egeya-Yumer Salim apparel factory is a bright room where 12 employees work on multicolored sports apparel and crisp white and green hospital uniforms. The company supplies uniforms to hospitals throughout Bulgaria, and recently won a new contract to supply uniforms to a Greek company. But a few years ago, says owner Yumer Salim, he and his wife almost had to close their business because they couldn't afford to buy a heavy-duty running stitch sewing machine and other equipment needed to sew stripes, belts and other features onto clothes. Orders had to be sent to another factory for completion, which sometimes delayed production.

In 2006 Yumer applied for a grant from Partners Bulgaria Foundation (PBF), the Bulgarian NGO that implements the USAID Ethnic Integration and Conflict Resolution Program. PBF funds small projects focused on economic development and educational advancement in communities with a high percentage of ethnic minorities. With the PBF grant of approximately \$5,000, Yumer was able to buy the new equipment to enable the company to fulfill orders on time and satisfy clients. Now he is focused on expanding his company's work for the Greek customer, and hopes to increase staff to 20 employees within the year. "USAID saved my business," says Yumer.

The company's employees reflect the ethnic diversity of Momchilgrad, a small town nestled in Bulgaria's Rhodope Mountain range in an area whose population is primarily ethnic Turkish and Bulgarian. The grant from PBF enabled the company to hire six additional workers from the local community, an important achievement given the area's relatively high unemployment.